



# ELSAH HISTORY

No. 118

Spring 2021

Published by the Historic Elsah Foundation, [www.historicelsah.org](http://www.historicelsah.org)

## The Semples of Elsah: Part III, 1866-1876

By George Provenzano, PhD



*Siblings Eugene Semple, circa 1870s, and Lucy Virginia Semple Ames, circa 1880s-1890s, Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, [UW 40184/UW 40189].*

*This article is the third in a series about the lives of James and Mary Semple, their children, and other family members in Elsah in the years before, during and after the Civil War. Part III covers the 10-year period following the war.*

At the beginning of 1866, the vestiges of the trauma from a horrific Civil War were slowly fading away. Reconstruction -- the politically contentious process of readmitting to the Union those Southern states that seceded in 1860-61 -- was underway. When mustered out of service, the victorious soldiers from the North returned to homes, farms, and businesses essentially unchanged by the war. In contrast,

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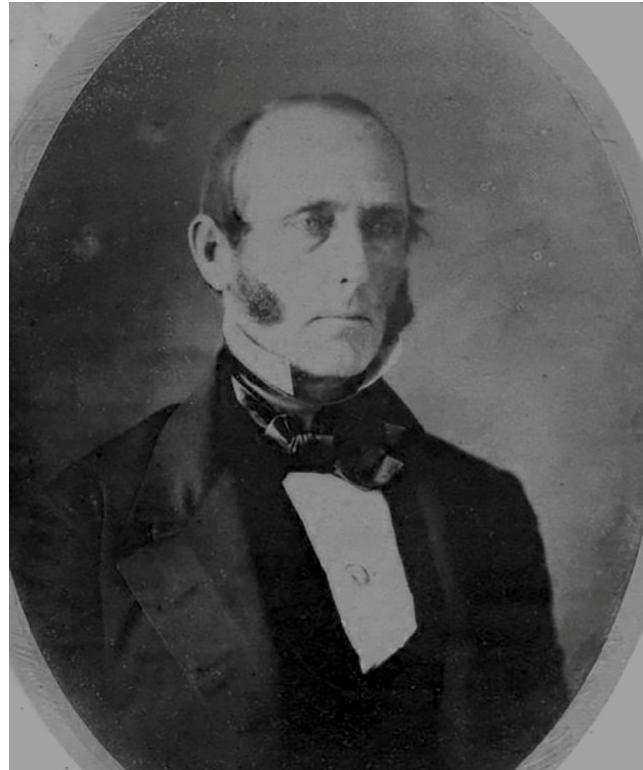
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the defeated soldiers of the South remained in place, but now on conquered ground. Although the Confederate veterans took an oath of allegiance to the government of the United States, many regretted that the war was ever begun, but only because they had lost. From Elsah, General James Semple wrote to his son Eugene, in Portland, Oregon, expressing great doubts as to whether President Andrew Johnson's approach would heal the disunion. He wondered if it would not instead result in the former Confederate states remaining as subjugated traitors ready to fight again another day.

### **Country vs. city life: Trevue and St. Louis**

Notwithstanding General Semple's keen interest in the political issues of the day, he was mainly focused on the economic circumstances of his family. He and his wife Mary enjoyed a comfortable existence at Trevue, their country home near Elsah. The Semples, their five adult children and spouses in Elsah, St. Louis, Portland, and Benicia, California, had escaped the war relatively unscathed. Despite having been an officer in the Illinois militia, in 1861 General Semple had chosen not to answer President Abraham Lincoln's call for volunteers to fight the Confederate Army. Stepdaughter Isabella's (Belle's) husband, Charles Floyd-Jones, a civil engineer, spent the war years building railroads in New York. Edgar Ames, oldest daughter Lucy's husband, was drafted but paid a substitute to replace him, as was allowed. Son Eugene Semple in Oregon and stepson Lansing Mizner in California did not encounter calls to volunteer for service.

On the occasion of his sixty-eighth birthday, January 5, 1866, James Semple sent Eugene a veiled suggestion to consider coming back home. He wrote that things looked good for business in Elsah. There were no signs the population was going down. Farm rents were



*General James Semple, circa 1850s. Courtesy of Village of Elsah Museum; donated by Rick Rydgren, great grandson of Eugene Semple, son of James Semple.*

rising and better than he had ever known them. The winter wheat crop looked promising. A railroad had been built from Alton to Jerseyville and points north, and two trains stopped in Jerseyville each day. The Jersey Landing Ferry across the Mississippi at Elsah, inoperative during the war, was re-established.

The Semple's youngest child, eighteen-year-old Julia, also sent a letter to Eugene, but with a different perspective on life in Elsah. She wrote from St. Louis, where she and her parents had stayed for most of the winter of 1865-66 in the home of older sister Lucy Semple Ames. During the winter social season, Lucy had presented Julia to St. Louis society. Julia made her grand debut at "...the handsomest party given in the city this season."

When spring arrived, James and Mary Semple prepared to return to Trevue, a plan Julia fiercely resisted. In her letter to her

brother, she expressed hope that stepsister Belle and husband Charles would come to Elsah and live with them. If they didn't, Julia whined, "... it be entirely too lonesome for just Ma, Pa, and I to live by ourselves." She added self-importantly, "for I had just as have live(d) in Sahara Desert as there (in Elsah), where I never see anyone for months."

### **Ames family businesses**

In St. Louis, commerce was returning to pre-war levels. Many businesses in the city had deteriorated under war-imposed martial law. One outstanding exception was the large meatpacking firms like the one owned by Lucy's husband Edgar Ames and his older brother Henry. These companies had prospered from the Union Army's large purchases of their packed beef and pork. When hostilities stopped, the army swiftly demobilized. Military demand for sustenance quickly evaporated; the prices of packed beef and pork plummeted; and Henry Ames & Co., as the firm was called, faced the ominous prospect of huge financial losses.

Edgar Ames worked feverishly to restore financial stability to the Ames' meatpacking partnership. He also attended to the other extensive business interests in grain storage, banking, insurance, and real estate that he and his brother had merged into their partnership. Edgar's ordeal was compounded by the fact that both he and his brother suffered from a paralytic neurodegenerative disease.

In Henry's case the symptoms had progressed to the point where his mobility was severely impaired. His legs had weakened, and he was constantly in pain. He hired porters to take him from place to place in his bed. In 1864, Henry spent three months at the well-known Cleveland Water Cure Establishment, undergoing hydrotherapy. During the winter of 1865-66 he went to Havana, Cuba, seeking the antidote of warmer weather. Lastly, in August

1866 during the unbearable summer heat in St. Louis, Henry asked Edgar to accompany him to St. Paul, Minnesota, to find cooler, more refreshing air. Unfortunately, all efforts to improve his condition failed, and Henry died on August 14, 1866, in Minnesota.

### **Loss of youngest and oldest family members**

While Edgar was in Minnesota, Mary Semple and daughter Julia invited Lucy to Trevue to join a large get-together of family and friends. James Semple was away, in Carbondale, Illinois, settling a tax lien against one of his properties, and Mary wanted to fill her home with company. Friends who were staying for the summer had already settled in when Lucy arrived with her three toddlers and two nurses in tow. Two of the Bradford cousins came down from Springfield. Ruth Burns, the African American domestic servant who had been a part of the Semple family since they lived in Alton in the mid-1840s, was there as cook. Ruth's presence was essential for the success of the gathering as the Semple women were not very skilled in the kitchen.

From Elsah, Lucy wrote to her brother Eugene. She noted that everything had changed since her last visit three years before. The house and grounds at Trevue were no longer well cared for. Trees and brush had proliferated so that one could scarcely see the house from the road, and in front, four large cedars blocked the view from the porch. Lucy insinuated to Eugene what she thought was obvious: their elderly parents were having difficulty keeping Trevue in good repair.

Lucy attributed the poorly kept state of Trevue to General Semple's inability to earn a good income from his tenant farmers, rather than to his age. Their father still worked his land on shares, she noted, concluding that he was not making a very princely fortune out of it. While Lucy added that she would not lecture Eugene,

she repeated her oft-given sermon that he was neglecting his familial duty by not coming back to Elsah to relieve their father of some of his responsibilities and look after their parents in their final days.

In the same letter, Lucy revealed she had given birth to a full-term baby boy a few months earlier. Despite the infant's healthy appearance, tragically, he lived but a few more days. The Ames parents were shattered emotionally, especially since they had not had the chance to christen him. The birth was Lucy's fourth in six years of marriage. Lucy did not have much support as she mourned the baby's loss. Edgar was executor of his older brother's estate and was running all of the family enterprises in the partnership by himself. He pushed himself very hard to make good for his brother's heirs as well as his own family. Edgar's intense commitment to business worried his father-in-law. James Semple wrote to Eugene that Edgar often excused himself from the table before dinner was half over to go to the office. The elder Semple thought his son-in-law's obsessive behavior was endangering his health.

However, the next family member to pass was General James Semple himself, who died peacefully at Trevue on December 20, 1866. He had been well on the previous Saturday when his wife Mary traveled to St. Louis to visit Lucy and the grandchildren for Christmas. His intention to follow his wife in a few days was stymied when he fell ill on Monday. When his condition worsened, the handyman went to Jerseyville to telegraph his wife to return home immediately. On Wednesday, Mary and Lucy took the packet boat to Alton. Because the river was frozen from there to Elsah, they had to go by horse and buggy to Trevue, arriving only a few hours before Semple died. Congestion of the lungs was the recorded cause of death.

Semple was nearly sixty-nine years old;

he had lived an exceptionally long life for the time. Lucy wrote to her brother Eugene that although their father had appeared to be healthy, he had for over a year talked much about dying, telling his family he was prepared for it. Lucy had her father interred in the Ames family plot in Bellefontaine Cemetery, north of St. Louis, where today the graves of James and Mary Semple are prominently marked.

### **Disposition of Semple estate**

James Semple died intestate. His estate consisted primarily of several thousand acres of land in and around Elsah, as well as dozens of other smaller land holdings scattered mainly in southern Illinois. Under common law, Semple's wife Mary was entitled to one-third of her husband's estate, but her two children by her first marriage, Belle and Lansing, were entitled to nothing. Mary offered to take "a child's share," by which she meant a smaller but equal portion to that inherited by each of their children. She also requested that Belle and Lansing receive an equal share of the estate. Knowing that General Semple had intended to leave something to his stepchildren, his own children Lucy, Eugene and Julia agreed; the estate would be divided equally into sixths.

As revealed in family correspondence dating from 1867 to 1876, nearly nine years elapsed before James Semple's heirs settled his estate. Because there was no immediate need to sell all of Semple's properties and divide the inheritance, Mary Semple expressed a desire to keep intact all the lands surrounding the Village of Elsah. These properties extended for several miles along the Mississippi River and on the bluffs above and included the present-day Village of Chautauqua, the Principia College campus and the Eliestoun estate that is also part of Principia. The heirs agreed to this plan, and they also agreed to dispose of the many smaller parcels of Semple-owned land outside Jersey County. This task proved to be quite time-

consuming; many holdings could not be sold without settling outstanding tax liens and other claims against their titles.

Although the Elsah lands were not sold, in the fall of 1875 the heirs agreed to assign specific sections that each would own when the estate was finally divided. Mary chose the family homestead, Trevue, and adjacent fenced, prime crop land; Lucy selected undeveloped land on the bluffs east of Elsah; Julia wanted undeveloped acreage on the bluffs west of the village; and the last three heirs split up the remaining farmland. From the very moment of James Semple's passing, Mary and her daughters made repeated invitations to Eugene to return home and manage the Elsah holdings for the benefit of all the heirs. Although he never verbally rejected these offers, his actions clearly demonstrated he had no intention of leaving the Northwest.

### Son Eugene Semple lured by gold

When Eugene Semple had left St. Louis in 1863, his father advised him to excel at practicing law, which would establish a strong basis for pursuing a business career or entering politics. It soon became clear, however, that young Semple did not possess the interest or self-discipline to earn a living as an attorney. His law partnership with Leonard Wolff, the young St. Louis lawyer who had accompanied him to Portland, lasted less than a year. The income Eugene earned from practicing law in Oregon did not meet his needs. He thought he could do better by following the hordes headed for the Idaho gold rush.

Gold was first discovered in Idaho in 1860. When new and richer discoveries were made near Idaho City in the Boise Basin in 1863, thousands of prospectors poured in; the population in the Basin became greater than that of Portland. In the spring of 1864, Eugene



### Museum Mystery

Above is an item from the Elsah Museum. What is it for?

- a) Washing clothes
- b) Gathering eggs
- c) Making bread

Turn to page 16 to find out!

journeyed to Boise City where gold prospectors assembled before going on to Idaho City. Initially he hoped to find more clients needing legal work, but he too was quickly swept up by the allure of quickly striking it rich. Eugene began "looking after mines," which meant investing in different mining ventures. Like his gambling at the card table, Eugene's betting on the likely success of mines did not pay off. He returned to Portland in the fall of 1864.

Because Eugene was chronically short of money, he frequently requested financial assistance from his father, who obliged by sending him fifty dollars (\$1,000 today) every month. His vices of drinking and gambling were troublesome diversions, but Eugene's most seductive distraction was a long-standing desire to enter politics.

## Eugene's newspaper venture

Toward this end, Eugene chose to follow the well-trodden 19<sup>th</sup> century path of owning a newspaper with an editorial policy consistent with one's political goals as the surest way to be elected. Like his father, he was a steady and consistent Democrat for his entire life. In Oregon, Eugene seized on the idea of reuniting the secessionist and pro-Union factions of the Democratic Party that had emerged at the beginning of the Civil War. He believed a united Democratic Party would improve his prospects of gaining an elected office. As a first step, Eugene helped start the *Weekly Oregon Herald* in Portland in 1866. The first issue was printed on March 17. The paper intended to voice Democratic Party views, counterbalancing those of the only other daily in Portland, the *Oregon Republican*.

Initially, Eugene wrote editorials for the *Herald* to supplement his meager income from practicing law. When the newspaper changed ownership in December 1867, he was hired city editor. Another ownership change opened the editor's position, which Eugene went for but lost, impelling him to resign in January 1869. However, because the paper's editorial policies were unsatisfactory to him, he was determined to buy it and install himself as editor. When the opportunity to do so arose in May 1869, Eugene sought financial backing from his wealthy sister Lucy and one other investor, Thomas Patterson. Lucy lent her brother most of the money needed to buy the paper. Her loan to Eugene was secured by a mortgage lien against his share of James Semple's estate. On July 1, 1869, Eugene Semple and Thomas Patterson took possession of the *Herald*.

To the surprise of his mother and sisters in Elsah and St. Louis, in December 1869 Eugene announced his engagement. His bride-to-be was Ruth Adelaide (Addie) Lowsdale, the daughter of a prominent, early Portland

landowner. Addie was only seventeen, and because her parents were deceased, she had a guardian, Dr. John A. Blanchard, who had known James Semple in Illinois. Mary Semple and her daughters welcomed Addie into the family with open arms. They quickly mobilized to meet their new 'sister.' Julia hurried west to meet her in California. Lucy went to Portland shortly after the wedding, which occurred on May 17, 1870, in Portland.

From the very start of Eugene's ownership, the *Herald* lost money. To recover some of his initial financial stake, in December 1871 he and two other businessmen incorporated the Herald Publishing Company, which purchased the *Herald*. Eugene's timing in starting this venture could not have been worse. Within 18 months, the corporation was bankrupt, and the *Herald* ceased publication, casualties of the Panic of 1873.

The ensuing economic depression was especially hard on Eugene. In 1874, he and his family left Portland and half-heartedly homesteaded on a sheep ranch in Lane County in southern Oregon. Criticizing the move, Lucy wrote, "Now if you leave Portland, why not come home? You can certainly do as well here in that (sheep) business as in anything else, and I cannot see the sense in your living as far away from all your relatives." Lucy's letter only added to the misery Eugene, his wife and children were experiencing.

## Daughter Lucy Ames takes the reins

After James Semple's death, his wife Mary did not want to live alone in Elsah. Daughter Lucy's life was rooted in St. Louis, and she was not interested in moving back to Elsah. Belle, Mary's daughter from her first marriage, was sensitive to her mother's needs. She and her husband Charles Floyd-Jones and their three children moved in with Mary at Trevue in the late 1860's.



*Lucy Virginia Semple Ames, 1880s-1890s, Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, [UW 40189]*

Barely one year after James Semple's death, Lucy's husband Edgar died unexpectedly, on December 9, 1867. For several years, Edgar had experienced mild symptoms of the same paralytic disease that afflicted his brother. In November his condition worsened and forced him to give up going to the office. He was confined to his bed under a doctor's care. After two weeks, he appeared to be recovering when he suffered sudden cardiac death; he was only forty-three.

Like his father-in-law, Edgar died intestate. Fortunately for Lucy and their children, Edgar's estate consisted of one-half interest in several well-functioning and very profitable companies. There was no immediate need to liquidate these enterprises. Each year they generated a sufficiently large income to

enable the heirs of both Edgar and Henry Ames to live in undisputed luxury.

### **Businesswoman extraordinaire**

Lucy was 31 and six months pregnant with her fifth child when Edgar died. She and her children, the oldest of whom was only six, inherited a business empire that would be worth between \$30-40 million today. The enterprises in Edgar's estate included one of the largest meat-packing companies in St. Louis, a major insurance house, and considerable real estate holdings in the city.

Lucy chose to retain legal responsibility as administratrix of the estate rather than doing what most wealthy widows did in her day — engage trustees to look after their inheritances. Thus, Lucy retained fiduciary responsibility to direct the businesses in the estate for her benefit as well as for the benefit of each of her children until age eighteen. Edgar had voiced his confidence in Lucy's abilities as a businesswoman. However, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, it was quite unusual for a woman, especially one as young as Lucy, to run any business let alone several as complex as those owned by the Ames brothers.

Details about Lucy's education are sketchy, but she clearly was better educated than most young women of her time. James Semple favored additional schooling beyond basic reading, writing and arithmetic for his daughters -- an uncommon practice in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. For young girls, obtaining today's equivalent of high school generally meant going to a boarding school. Lucy's oldest sister Ada attended Monticello Female Seminary in Godfrey, Illinois, from 1849 to 1851. During these years, Lucy lived with Aunt Adeline and Uncle John Bradford in Springfield and likely attended the Springfield Female Seminary. Lucy's obituary also mentions her attending Sacred Heart Convent in St. Charles, Missouri,



*Notch Cliff estate, rear view, c. 1890. Courtesy of the Principia Archives, Elsah, IL.*

during her years living at Trevue.

However, Lucy's fine education did not include instruction in business practices, as none was offered in the classroom during this era. Both men and women acquired business skills through experience. In this regard, Lucy had several mentors: her father; her Springfield businessman Uncle John Bradford; and especially her husband Edgar. During his decline Lucy read to Edgar his considerable business correspondence, allowing him to advise her carefully on his affairs.

Fortunately Lucy was a quick study. After Edgar passed, she faced an immense financial trial by fire that Julia described in a letter to Eugene: "She [Lucy] will have to go to work immediately either to administer on the

estate herself or appoint one as they are just in the midst of the packing season and have nine-hundred thousand dollars (\$18 million today) worth of hogs killed and contracted for the business."

### **Lucy's exuberant lifestyle**

The loss of a son, her father and her husband in less than two years were hard blows for Lucy. Yet they did not cause her to alter her lavish lifestyle. As was typical in a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century marriage, Lucy had born several children in quick succession. Unlike most wives, however, she possessed an abundance of resources with which to care for them, both at home and when she traveled. From the first days of her marriage, she had enjoyed the uninterrupted support of household servants,

nurses, governesses and tutors. When her children reached age nine or ten, she escorted them to and from boarding schools in the East.

Lucy loved to travel. She usually was away from St. Louis from mid-summer to mid-fall, traveling with companions, including her mother and sisters Julia and Belle. During the Civil War, she journeyed north during the hot months to Chicago, Milwaukee, Lake Superior, and Cleveland. In 1869, she spent several weeks at the resort at Healing Springs, Virginia, where she encountered Robert E. Lee and a reunion of Confederate generals. On the same trip she traveled to New York, Newport and Boston. After Eugene married, Lucy went west to Benicia, San Francisco and Portland. In 1874, she traveled east, including to the New Jersey Shore, where President and Mrs. Grant entertained her at Long Branch, their seaside summer home.

After Edgar's death, Lucy was not hesitant about deploying her immense wealth. She commissioned highly sought-after St. Louis architect George I. Barnett to design and build a mansion for her in the very fashionable Lucas Place residential community. Barnett's work established the local standard for luxury accommodations in St. Louis in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. He created a three-story, brick residence with a semi-circular front that was unique to the neighborhood. Featuring eighteen rooms, the home was completed in 1870 at a cost of \$54,000 (\$1.1 million today).

The following year, Lucy set about developing a country estate. As early as 1866, she and Edgar had proposed locating it on the bluffs near Elsah. She began by spending about \$25,000 (\$500,000 today) to construct a great Victorian stone mansion that some said resembled a castle. Lucy's grand home was completed in 1872, but she continued to make improvements to the house and gardens. Developing the surrounding acreage into a

working farm, she planted crops, raised cattle, kept a dairy herd, and hired a full-time caretaker to manage these activities. She called the estate Notch Cliff after a break in the bluffs that permitted a commanding view of the Mississippi River below and the Missouri River a few miles in the distance.

### **Daughter Julia's marriage**

Youngest daughter Julia Semple married Ashley David Scott on November 27, 1872, at Christ Church Episcopal Cathedral in St. Louis. When the couple became engaged, Lucy wrote to Eugene that Mr. Scott was a well-to-do gentleman and, in every respect, worthy of Julia. Lucy added that Julia wanted her brother to come home to give the bride away. Although Eugene did not oblige, the wedding was a momentous social event for which Lucy hosted a very large reception at Notch Cliff.

Born in Ohio, Ashley Scott had arrived in St. Louis at the end of the Civil War and established a very successful wholesale merchant business in dry goods and groceries. As an entrepreneur, he fit in well as an advisor on business affairs to Mary Semple and Lucy Ames. When Mary inherited the presidency of the Elsah Building & Manufacturing Company, she named Ashley as secretary. In this capacity, he helped Mary sell rental properties and undeveloped lots in Elsah. For Lucy, Ashley recommended ways to diversify her enterprises in St. Louis. Ashley's business advice became a source of family friction for Eugene, who did not always agree with his brother-in-law's proposals.

### **Mary Semple's Demise**

James Semple's wife Mary died peacefully at Trevue on December 15, 1875. She had been in good health up to the final year of her life. At that point, her stamina waned and she experienced difficulty with her mobility.

The doctor said the cause of death was congestion of the lungs. She was 69 years old and was buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery next to her husband.

Mary Semple's death precipitated final settlement of James Semple's estate, as well as her own. Although Mary died intestate, she had expressed to her daughters a desire to leave all her farmland near Elsah to Eugene. Lansing, Mary's son by her first marriage, was unwilling to comply with his mother's wish, thus necessitating dividing up and selling some of Mary's property. Julia agreed to take Trevue, which her husband had put back into good condition. She wrote to Eugene agreeing to give him the family homestead if he would only return home. Lucy and Belle also begged Eugene to bring his wife and little children, now numbering three, from Oregon to Elsah. When Eugene declined, Lucy purchased her brother's inheritance and applied the proceeds against his indebtedness to her. She also purchased her stepbrother Lansing's share, giving her approximately sixty percent ownership of what had been James Semple's original estate near Elsah.

Mary Semple's passing brought an end to the family's occupancy of Trevue. Belle, who lived there with her mother, had been widowed the year before. With her children grown or away at boarding school, she did not need a residence of her own and moved in with Julia in St. Louis. Lucy closed up Notch Cliff and set off with her four children on a grand tour of education and sightseeing in Europe. The passing of James and Mary Semple ended their contributions to Elsah's economic development. With Trevue vacated and Notch Cliff shuttered, involvement of their descendants in family gatherings and community events in Elsah ceased temporarily. When Lucy returned refreshed from her four-year sojourn in Europe, she committed herself to renewing the Semple family presence in Elsah from Notch Cliff, the subject of an upcoming Part IV of this series.

*Dr. George Provenzano is an economist with over 50 years of experience in research and teaching in academia, including at the University of Illinois, Urbana; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and Battelle Memorial Institute in the private sector. Since retiring in 2006, he has done extensive research and speaking on local Riverbend history.*

## **Elsah Museum Photography Exhibit “My Favorite Window”**

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Elsah windows constitute the focal point of the Village's 21<sup>st</sup> annual Photography Contest. The photographs receiving awards or recognition in the 2020 Contest (2021 Contest postponed) are currently on display at the Elsah Museum (weekends, 1-4 pm).

The participating photographers approached the window theme from a variety of fascinating angles, using windows as framers, openings to views beyond, reflectors, revealers

and distorters. Designed to celebrate and foster an appreciation of the beauty and unique qualities of the Village, the Contest undoubtedly achieved its goal with these stunning entries.

Awards consisted of two purchase prizes (to become part of the Museum collection), a Youth Award, 8 Special Recognition awards, and 6 Historic Window Awards:

**2020 Village of Elsah Purchase Prize:**



(within Elsah valley): “Barbara’s View” by Barbara Clark of Elsah. Judge Erica Popp noted the relevance of the image for this time period when we are inside our homes looking out.

**The Greatriverroad.com prize:**



(larger surrounding area): “Foggy Illuminations” by Kim Howland of Godfrey. This night image (the only one) captures the windows of a Maybeck-designed building. “How poetic that the fog, something thought to obscure, gives focus to the light,” the judge commented.

**Youth Award:**



(ages 12-18) “Window Waves of Elsah” by Jonah Hosmer of Godfrey. The judge said of this image that it made “full use of the opportunity to use the reflection in the old glass to create a whimsical double exposure effect.”

**Special recognition award winners:**

Jerry Benner, Karen King, Kim Howland, Rosa Renner, Chuck Parr, Patricia Ott, Hope Mader, Joan Baker.

**Historic Window awards:**

Karen King, Ray Watsek, Yvonne Mossman, Carolyn Schlueter, Jim Noeninger, Robert Erxleben

All the photographs are for sale and proceeds are retained by the photographer. The Village of Elsah Museum Advisory Committee thanks all who made this exhibit possible with their funding and time: The Village of Elsah Board of Trustees and Mayor Pitchford, Historic Elsah Foundation, Greatriverroad.com, Green Tree Inn, Burton Art Services, Abigail DeWeese, and Museum attendants Mary Lu Peters and Donna DeWeese.

# Elsah Wins Wetland Restoration Grant

By Cecily Lee



Volunteers from the Village are helping put the plants in the ground.

The Village Board of Trustees applied for the grant in partnership with the Great Rivers Land Trust (GRLT), Principia College, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Alley Ringhausen at GRLT was very supportive of the process, which the Village greatly appreciates. Resident and ecologist Jeff DePew made the selection of the native plants for purchase from Forest Keeling Nursery in Missouri.

You may have noticed truckloads of large rocks placed along the banks of the creek at strategic intervals. These revetments (from



On Earth Day, April 22, the Village of Elsah got some good news! Illinois American Water announced the awarding of eight environmental grants on watershed initiatives to communities across Illinois, and Elsah was one of the recipients. As reported in the April 23 issue of *The Telegraph*, our grant is for the full amount requested, that is, \$3,275, out of a total of some \$29,000 awarded. Our grant is being used to help create a public space that incorporates wetland, stream preservation and native plantings. With the funds we have purchased more small trees and shrubs to help stabilize the streambanks in order to slow erosion, trap debris and soil, and filter pollutants before they reach the stream and river.



the French word “vetement” for “clothing” or “covering”) help fortify the stream banks. The impact of erosion on the banks over time is visible in the apparent “lengthening” of the pipes that empty into the creek, as well as in the caved-in appearance of some of the banks (see photos).

In another new development, a woodchip path was laid alongside the creek on the east side of the village in May. This path invites residents and visitors to walk through, observe, listen and enjoy the beauty of the wetland area.



## Historic first: Black Mayor of Alton



Cheering crowds gathered in the street in front of Alton City Hall on the evening of May 12 to celebrate the historic swearing in of David Goins as mayor of the City of Alton, the first Black man to hold the job. Rev. Goins is currently pastor of Morning Star Missionary Baptist church. He has served as a member of the Alton School District Board of Education, a member of the Civil Service Commission and a sergeant in the Alton Police Department for 25 years. Rev. Goins replaces outgoing mayor Brant Walker. In announcing his vision for Alton as a “regional prosperity hub,” Goins stated, “We will be committed to collaboration that betters the lives of everyone in Alton and the region,” *The Telegraph* reported.

# Historic Elsah Foundation News

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## Remembering loved members

We honor these dear Elsah neighbors and friends who have passed on this year.

**Steven Max DeWeese**, born in Nashville, Kansas, was beloved husband to HEF President Donna DeWeese and dear father to their daughter, Abigail. A private reception was held in his honor at Farley's Music Hall on March 13. Steve was an HEF member who loved Elsah and cherished living here. The DeWeese family sends a big "Thank You" to all for the loving support offered.

**Mary Anne Schmidt**, long-time Elsah resident and HEF member, passed on gently with her family at her side. First married to Arthur Schulz, Headmaster of Principia School and later president of Principia College, Mary Anne was a kind and gracious head hostess for each campus. After Schulz' passing, she married College art professor James Schmidt.

**Bonnie Castroman** was known for her joyous nature and care for others. Husband Emilio shares that she was always active, whether helping a neighbor in need in the middle of the night, riding her bicycle to Pere Marquette State Park, or making dinner for friends. She loved life to the fullest. He says poet Jocelyn Birch captures Bonnie's spirit as "radiant, undying joy."

## Kudos to a young HEF volunteer

Historic Elsah Foundation greatly appreciates Abigail DeWeese for her volunteer work over three years. She has been host in the



Elsah Museum, tour guide for two Home for the Holidays, helper on the 2020 Photography Exhibit, and partner in organizing HEF's first on-line Holiday Auction last December. A 2021 graduate of Principia College, Abigail will stay on, having been hired as the College Library's Systems, Acquisitions, Accounting, & Copyright Manager.

## Gretchen Batz photography shared

An exhibit of Gretchen Batz's photography was held at Farley's Music Hall on March 20, 2021. Gretchen and husband Roger lived in Elsah for some 45 years until Gretchen's passing in 2019. Roger now resides in St. Louis. A long-time friend of Historic Elsah Foundation, Gretchen was a prolific



### **Farley's Music Hall, a present-day venue**

Farley's Music Hall at 37 Mill Street in Elsah continues to function as a prized gathering spot, true to its original purpose. Constructed in 1885 by Dr. Farley, the building is now owned and maintained by Historic Elsah Foundation. Recently, Farley's has been used for a birthday party, bridal shower, celebration of life and reception. For private rental information, contact Connie Davis, [owner.greentreeinn@gmail.com](mailto:owner.greentreeinn@gmail.com).

photographer. She won a Sierra Club national award and had her work published in magazines and books. For many years, HEF was honored to receive her submissions to the Elsah Photography Contest. Elsah resident and friend Tammy Wampole organized the exhibit in order to share Gretchen's work with the community. Visitors could select matted photographs to keep. Many attendees made donations to Historic Elsah Foundation in appreciation.

### **Elsah Museum welcomes visitors**

The Elsah Museum at 26 LaSalle Street is open every Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 pm during the months of April through October. It is located in a building first known as the Village Hall, where functions were held in Elsah's early days. Upon completion in 1887, a Christmas party was held there as a grand opening. HEF members staff the Museum and can answer questions. There is no charge to visit, so please stop by for a stroll through Elsah's rich history.



### **Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series Updates**

Please check [www.historicelsah.org](http://www.historicelsah.org), our website, for updates on the Lecture Series, other activities and publications. Several lectures that had to be postponed due to Covid are in the process of being rescheduled.

# Museum Mystery

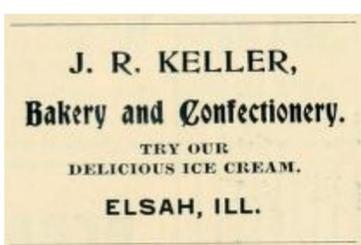
...continued from page 5

If you guessed

c) Making bread

you are correct!

The mystery item is a bread bowl from the Keller Bakery, which provided baked goods and confections to hungry customers in the Village of Elsah. The Keller family were some of the earliest settlers in Elsah; Louis and Veronika Keller moved to the Village in 1856. Their son Edward purchased the building at 20 LaSalle St. in 1879, where his wife Josephine (Huss) Keller opened a bakery and confectionery business.



Here, she whipped up such delicious treats as 'Esquimo pies' and ice cream sodas for

customers. The *Jersey County Democrat* raved that Keller's Bakery was "crowded every night by the belles and beaus of Elsah. Keller's is the 'Bon temps' place to go in this village."

The bakery's sweet offerings satiated many a sweet tooth for nearly a century: the bakery sold its last pastry in 1970, making it the oldest surviving business in Elsah (Elsah Guidebook p.15).

The bread bowl was donated to the Elsah Museum in 2004 by Edward Keller, grandson of the original bakery owner. Imagine what delicious treats this bowl must have held throughout its lifetime: cake batter, pie fillings, bread and cookie dough.

## Historic Elsah Foundation Board 2021 Officers

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## HEF Purpose

The purposes of Historic Elsah Foundation are the preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings, houses, architecture and culture of the Village of Elsah, Illinois, the encouragement of historical research on the Village and other nearby historic areas, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets and periodicals regarding the Village, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the general public of the historical and education value of the Village.

## Elsah History Newsletter

**Editor:** Cecily Lee

**Photographs & Layout:** Melody Hauf-Belden

**HEF News:** Blair Smith

## Memberships for 2021

Patron	\$25 to \$99
Supporter	\$100 to \$249
Founder's Circle	\$250 and above
James Semple Business Associate	\$100

Elsah History is published by Historic Elsah Foundation. Subscription to the newsletter is included with membership. (ISNN 1552-9002)

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